



Claims Conference Holocaust Survivor Memoir Collection

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My name is Jack Teichman. 23/4/2008

I was born in a small town named Zdenovo in an area known as Karpatia or Podkarpatska Russ. Because of the nearby Karpatian mountains, in eastern Europe. The area was part of the Austria/Hungarian Empire before the First World War, then after the war it became part of the newly created country of Czechoslovakia, in 1939 it became part of Hungary and at the end of the Second World War it became part of the Ukraine which it still is.

My parents had six children of which I was the fourth. I had two older sisters an older brother a younger sister and a little brother.

In 1939 when Podkarpatska Russ became part of Hungary and the economic situation deteriorated those young people that could left the town.

Among those that left were six of my cousins, the descendants of my fathers eldest sister who went to live in Budapest where they all found jobs.

After about a year or so they found a job for one of my sisters in the Jewish hospital in Budapest and in June 1943 the youngest of the six cousins

To whom I was very close found me a job as an apprentice with a much assimilated Jewish Taylor which also included full board.

As an apprentice I didn't get any pay but we had some very well to do customers all over Budapest so whenever we finished a garment I would deliver it to the customer and they always gave me a tip, which was enough for my cousin and myself to go to two or three picture shows on Sunday mornings when it was cheaper. We also went to the circus the theatre and I even saw my first opera in Budapest which was Tosca.

So we led a fairly happy life for about nine months until March 1944.

It was a fine Sunday morning, we had tickets to three picture shows, when all these airplanes came flying very low over the city.

We soon heard that Budapest and indeed all of Hungary was occupied by German forces and that all places of entertainment are closed.

The persecution of the Jews started almost immediately. The apartment where we lived was on the third floor of a very busy arcade but we could hear the newspaper vendors yelling out "read all about what is going to happen to the Jews" and happen it did.

Jews were forbidden from entering any place of entertainment, were not allowed to own a radio, had to wear a yellow star on their chest if

they went out in the street etc.

There was suddenly quite a bit of fear and even panic, so much so that there were cues in front of churches of Jews converting to Christianity, to save themselves.

We also heard that our families at home have been rounded up, and then some days later we heard that they were taken to a ghetto in Mukachevo,

Which is the nearest big city to our town.

On the 22nd of June 1944 I received a notice in the mail to immediately report in a place named Vac which is a town about 30KM from Budapest.

It took me a couple of days to get myself organized so on the 24th of June I caught a train to Vac. The place where I had to report was a building belonging to the local Jewish community and there were already quite a lot of men there.

After a couple of days there we were taken to a field which had rail line running past it and we were standing there I overheard a man say that they are calling up men aged 18 and over so I said to him that I wasn't quite 18 yet so he advised me to go and tell them, but I didn't because I regarded it as a bit of an adventure.

After a while a train came along consisting of enclosed carriages like they use for cargo, so we all embarked and took off.

The doors of the carriages were not closed so we could see the names of the towns that we went through and some of the people on board came to the conclusion that we were heading for a notorious slave labor camp in a town named Bor in Serbia and after about a week on the train we arrived in that camp.

The next day some of us were loaded on trucks and taken to village about 60KM from Bor the name of which I can no longer remember but the name of the camp was Rožn. We were housed in 4 houses and I remember counting the double wooden bunks in the room that I was in, there were 42 of us in that room. The bunks had a bit of hessian for a mattress but nothing to cover ourselves with, but as it was mid summer that did not bother us much.

The work we had to do consisted of building a rail line from Bor to Belgrade. The group that I was in was put to work cutting through a small hill.

We were organized in groups of 4 men and each group had to dig out 4 cubic meters of soil and load it onto mono rail trucks.

There were also some Italian ex soldiers from General Badoglio's

army who operated the mono rail and did some blasting because the ground was like a lime stone and a pick just bounced off it.

We were guarded at work by German soldiers belonging to a branch called 'organization tod organization death.

The food we received was as follows, in the morning before we went to work we were given a bit of weak black coffee, every second day we were given a loaf of bread which some people said contained some saw dust and in the evening we were given, one day some boiled barley and the next day some boiled peas.

One day I noticed that the peas I was eating had a dark centre so I opened one and found that the dark centre was a weevil. After that I didn't eat the peas.

Also the Hungarian guards had a system of punishing people for any reason at all. Behind the house that I lived in they built a sturdy wooden structure with hooks in the top section. When they felt like punishing somebody, they tied their hands behind their backs then fed the rope through the hooks in top of this wooden structure and pulled the person up till their feet did not touch the ground. The minimum time that anybody was sentenced to this torture was two hours and more often than not it was several times two hours but nobody lasted longer than about half an hour before they fainted so they would let them down throw some water over them to revive them then pull them up again.

Some of our people somehow managed to make contact with the Serbian partisans because we were told that if we hear shooting to run to the back fence which will be cut and we will be able to escape, but that never happened.

We stayed in that camp for about 3 months until early October 1944. One afternoon we were told to line up and off we marched, after two days walking we arrived back in Bor.

The man in charge of the Bor camp was a Hungarian army sergeant. Somehow he found out that it was Yom Kipur, something I didn't know

.The Hungarians call Yom Kippur the long day, so he said to some of us I will give you a long day, he then pointed to a partly demolished house on a hill some distance outside the camp, we were then ordered to go up to that house and each of us to bring back 8 bricks. I tied 2 lots of 4 bricks together with a piece of electric wire I found, put it on my shoulder and carried them down to the camp. As we came to the camp gate this sergeant stood there with a rubber truncheon and

everybody was hit over the head with it.

Towards the end of October we were again lined up and the people whose surnames started with the letters A to R or S I am not quite sure which but I know that it stopped before the letter T as I was not included. I heard somebody say that there were 6000 of us and that the people whose surnames started with the letters A to S numbered about 4000 they then marched them off. I was later told by some Serbs that a lot of them if they couldn't walk were shot, the survivors ended up in concentration camps.

I was in the second group and we left the camp about two weeks after the first group.

We walked for a day and a half when about midday of the second day as we were walking through the countryside with a bit of a forest on one side we heard a shot and immediately all these armed partisans came out of the forest, they soon disarmed the Hungarian guards that accompanied us and let us go.

We were now free but what followed was probably the worst three weeks of my life.

It was now late autumn so it rained a lot, we had no food and no shelter we just kept walking through the countryside without having the faintest idea where we were going. Occasionally we came across a field that still had some maize that hadn't been harvested so we picked that and ate it raw, another time we found a pear tree that had been neglected so the pears were only about the size of walnuts so we ate that. Another time we were walking through a village and there were some women standing in the street prepared to exchange anything useful that we may have for some food. All I had was three pairs of underpants which I exchanged for some maize flour and so if we stopped sometime and lit a fire I would mix a bit of that flour with water boil it and eat it. To try and protect myself from the rain I picked up a blanket that somebody had thrown away but for some reason we went across a river and when we got to the other side I realized that I lost the blanket. One night as we were walking along a very muddy road my feet got stuck in the mud and I lost my shoes, but I had picked up a pair of shoes that somebody had thrown away, when I tried to put them on I found that they were too short and too narrow so I bent the backs of them and put them on. Then because the shoes were too narrow and my feet were wet, I got a huge blister on one of my big toes which after a while burst.

Some time after all this as we were walking on some country road a

young fellow of our group came up to me and asked me to help him as he couldn't walk any further. So I told him to slow down and let everybody pass us and then we will decide what to do. There was a creek running alongside the road that we were on and when we were quite sure that there was nobody behind us we jumped down to the creek bed and had a bit of a rest. After a while we climbed back up to the road and stood there contemplating what to do next as it was now late afternoon and we couldn't see any sign of life where we were, we then noticed two people coming towards us. When they got closer it turned out that they were a young girl and her younger brother but when we spoke to them in a Slav language called Ruthanian which is distantly related to other Slav languages including Ukrainian and also Serbian, but the girl didn't understand what we were saying because as it turned out they were ethnic Rumanians and girls didn't go to school so they didn't learn speak Serbian but boys did, they then told us to follow them. After a while we turned off the road we were on and came to a little house inside were the owners a husband and wife who fed us some polenta with a bottle of home distilled plum brandy being passed around, while sitting on the floor around a low table, which was the only furniture in the house. The lady also washed our clothes in the creek that ran past the house and she put some candle grease on my blistered toe which made it heal up in no time. We slept on the floor of a little room next to the main room on some straw, the owners slept somewhere else. The old man would sometime be out all day and come home late at night and if I was asleep he would wake me up bring out the bottle of brandy and some tobacco leaves which he grew and any peace of paper he could find and we would sit there drinking and smoking.

The couple also had another daughter; she was 15 years old and married. Some days she and her husband would arrive at her parent's house but the husband would then leave after a while. One day the husband said to me that if I touched his wife he would kill me. One night when the young husband was away, I woke up to find her laying very close to me whispering something, but I ignored her. One evening about two weeks after we got there two partisans walked in and told us we couldn't stay there any longer and we had to leave immediately . It was very likely that the husband of the younger daughter who sent them , so we had to leave.

It was a very dark night and as we walked along a horse and cart caught up with us, which stopped and the driver told us to climb up.

(And this was the first of many cases of generosity and kindness that the Serbs showed us .After a while we came to a village or town and we had to get off. We then noticed some Russian soldiers around a fire preparing some food, so we approached them and asked them for some of the food they were preparing but instead of giving us some food, they took us to an officer who turned out to be Jewish, and who interrogated us but gave us no food.

We then decided to try and find somewhere to spend the rest of the night, as we wandered around we came to a building and looking through the window we could see that it was empty; it may have been a school building, so we broke a window, got inside, laid down on a table and slept. In the morning we went back to the Russians where there were girl soldiers directing the traffic of trucks on their way to the front.

,We asked them whether we could get a lift on one of the trucks, and standing there for about a day and a half we finally got a lift on one of the trucks which took us to Belgrade. We approached a man in the street and asked him whether he knew of any Jews in the city, he said yes and led us to a building, and as we entered we saw some ladies there doing something so we told them who we were they then gave us something to eat and allowed us to stay there , and were allowed to sleep on the floor. But after two days we were told that we can't stay there any longer , so we left and after walking for a while came to the banks of the river Danube. There were quite a lot people there and they were embarking on little boats that took them to the other side of the river as the bridge that had been there was destroyed by the retreating German troops, so we too jumped on one of the boats and took off. To our horror the boat that we were on, instead of going across the river turned and went up the river and to make matters worse, the other passengers started paying the driver. As my mate and I were discussing our predicament and we spoke Hungarian , one of the other passengers understood what we were saying so he spoke to the other passengers , who then took up a collection and paid our fare. Another case of Serbian generosity. We eventually reached a town called Novy Sad by the Serbs and decided to stay there for a while , but we thought that we better ask permission from somebody , so we found to what we thought were Municipal Offices and told somebody of our intension but they were not interested and told us to go and speak to the Russians but they too were not interested. When we got off the boat we were very

hungry and were standing near a house which had a window open so I said to my friend that if I see somebody inside I am going to ask for a piece of bread , it suddenly hit me that here I am prepared to beg for a piece of bread and I to this day it still get upsets me when I think about it

While going from office to office , we came to a building and some men were loading some furniture onto truck parked in front of it , so we helped with the loading. When the truck left we went inside the building and noticed that it was almost empty so we explored it and came across a room with a half glass door which was locked , looking trough the window we saw things that we needed , so we forced the door open and I found a nice heavy jacket and a pair of shoes and my friend also found an overcoat and we stayed the night there. Next morning when we came down we couldn't believe our eyes , there was a table set for breakfast loaded with jams , cheeses and even bottles of brandy so we just sat down and had a nice breakfast. We then went out and asked someone whether there are any Jews in this town ,we were led to a house where we found an elderly lady and her not very young daughter they were very nice and told us that we could stay the night which we did in a beautiful clean bed, they also fed us.

My mate then decided to volunteer to join the partisans. At his first attempt he wasn't accepted (I didn't go with him as I just wanted to go home but the next day he kept pestering me so I finally agreed to go with him . This time they accepted us and even gave us a rifle each. We were then assigned to a group of soldiers and started training in setting up and firing mortar guns. A few days later we were told that a train load of soldiers and some equipment is about to leave town and our job was to guard this train. I then found out that this train was going to a town by the name of Chupria where they were setting up a non commissioners officers school, i also found out that there will be a tailors work shop in this school to make uniforms for the soldiers so I spoke to the officer in charge and got a position in this workshop.

We spent six months there till the wars end ,when we applied to be released from the army .It took about two or three weeks before our request was granted . We were given release documents and train tickets to Belgrade. In Belgrade we went to the Check consulate and explained who we were and told them that we wanted to go home. Thy gave us an ID card and told us that there will be a train leaving in

a day or two and we can catch it, which we did. There were nine of us, Chechs the other seven were not Jews . When we got to the outskirts of Budapest we were informed that the train isn't going any further till next morning , so I decided to go into the city and try to find my sister. I first went to the place where she used to live but the house was bombed and was just a heap of rubble so I went to the Jewish hospital where she was working .

I had a photo of her so showed it to somebody at the desk and asked whether they knew that person, the answer was no, but was told that as it is time for the staff shift change a lot of people will soon be coming out. When they did , I went from one person to another, showed them the photo asked them whether they knew that person ,finally somebody recognized her and told me that she is working in another branch of the hospital on the other side of the city. When I got there I told some of the nurses that I am looking for Piri Teichman and that I am her brother,

It must have been a terrible shock to them because they started screaming. They soon found my sister but what she had to tell me was a terrible shock to me , namely that our family were taken to a concentration camp and the only one to survive was our eldest brother and that he is in a sanatorium in Prague recovering. After the war the Chech government sent busses to the concentration camps and picked an Chech citizens that survived.

My sister also told me that one of my fathers sisters survived and has gone back to her home and that my young cousin has gone to see her. So next morning I was on my way to my aunt , my fathers only surviving sister. My cousin and I then decided to go to our town and pick up some family photos but when we got there we found our houses standing but there was not a stick of furniture in the house our neighbors obviously helped themselves so of course no photos.

When I got back to Budapest I would go every day to a place where concentration camp survivors gathered. One day as I was walking along a street on my way towards that place I came face to face with my brother, he was going to go past me because he didn't recognize me as I was 17 years old when I left home and was now 19 but I recognized him. We stayed in Budapest most of 1945 we then moved to A town named Usti Nad Labem in Czechoslovakia , but because we were of military age and other reasons we left Czechoslovakia in February 1946 and went to live in a refugee camp in a town called Badgastein in Austria where we stayed about a

year then on to another refugee camp just outside Munich in Germany where we stayed about two and a half years. One day we saw a sign in the camp that we can apply to go to Australia, which we did ,about a month later we were on our way and on 13th of November 1949 we landed in Melbourne .